

Fakhoury, Hani. Interviewed 2012. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.

Early Lebanese Solidarity After the Nakba

Just as the Palestinian Nakba caused a great shock in Palestine and all Arab and Islamic countries, it affected Lebanese people, young and old. When we were in high school and at university, we constantly believed we should be doing something. We came up with the idea of providing some type of military training for students at school and university. We gradually started to request this training, forming delegations to take our demands to the army leadership, and to consecutive governments. Then we escalated the pressure, holding a series of demonstrations at every possible occasion. We persisted until the idea of military training in high schools was approved - it became normal that when a student obtained his high school degree, it would be accompanied by a certificate stating that he had completed military training at that school. This military training was different to the compulsory military training that was approved later. After that I joined E'bad al-Rahman group. It was a group advocating a simple concept. The concept was that we had moved away from Islam, and that's why Palestine was lost, and so we need to return to Islam to be able to liberate Palestine. The group was basically a scout group, but it was a group that had advanced and extensive scout training. The Islam that this group adhered to was a modern Islam not a conservative Islam. It held meetings to teach the clear and simple lessons of Islam that would be acceptable to young people. For example, we used to pray in swimming suits, which didn't cause problems or protests. We conducted training we considered important, and which was indeed extremely important. We finished the training with camping, long treks, swimming in the sea, trips to al-Rawsha or the high mountains of Lebanon, and other places.

Filastinuna

We continued to send delegations; it was my destiny and my decision that I had chosen to work in the Palestinian refugee camps, especially Ain al-Hilweh. I used to spend all Sunday from the morning until the evening in Ain al-Hilweh. There I met the brothers in Ain al-Hilweh, some of whom I named the 'tribe of Bani al-Attrash', such as the late Ahmad al-Attrash and Ali al-Attrash, as well as people who followed them from al-Attrash family, such as the late Ziad al-Attrash, the al-Jishi family, and many honorable Palestinian

¹ This work is made available under a Creative Commons 4.0 International Licence, and must be used accordingly. Please see citation guidelines on the About Us page.

families. We held discussions, educated and trained people in what we had ourselves learnt, until the start of 1959. As I had discovered at the start of 1959, those who had recognised Lebanon as a space for open media wanted to spread the ideas they shared. They consulted some Palestinian youth, including some in Ain al-Hilweh, and through these youth in Ain al-Hilweh, I met them at a fridge and machine shop on Bishara el-Khoury street in Beirut. The vice-president of E'bad al-Rahman group owned the shop. I salute this man because he deserves it. The first meeting was attended by the martyrs, may god have mercy on their souls, Yasser Arafat, Khalil al-Wazir, Salah Khalaf, Farouq al-Qaddoumi, and Abu Youssef al-Najjar. When the notion was proposed, we already shared the belief that we needed to take action to liberate Palestine, and we realized we had similar ideas on this. From the first meeting with my dear brothers, "our spirits were in harmony", as they say as the "spirits are soldiers: those who meet become close, and those who are unfamiliar don't." From the first we had an agreement on timing, language and ideology. The question here became: what do we need to do? They said we need to publish a newspaper, a magazine where we can explain our ideas and goals. In Lebanon you needed a license to publish a magazine. I remembered that one of the backbones of E'bad al-Rahman's constitution was the right of the group to publish. I also remembered that E'bad al-Rahman had the right to publish a newsletter. We proposed the idea to E'bad al-Rahman and Haj Tawfiq Khoury asked for sometime to think about it, before giving his response. He said he could use his name to publish the magazine but he didn't have time to manage publishing it. We said hopefully we could do that, and we agreed on this. So from the end of 1959 to the end of 1964 we published forty editions of 'Filastinuna: a Call for Life'. It was an irregular publication. What was the importance of this magazine? It was the first initiative, its importance was that it was an experiment – which was the right thing to do. Many say the start of the Palestinian National Liberation movement started with the first operation called 'First Bullet' in 1964. In my opinion this is partially correct, as it is more accurate to say that Fateh's ideology was developed during those four years: when Fateh's ideology matured, the first operation was launched. This was a very important and a very sensitive issue. If we made a simple calculation, a magazine that consisted of 32 pages and was issued 40 times, how many pages would that be? It would 1320 pages. Those 1320 pages and the articles in them were written by hand. The brothers I mentioned handwrote those articles, as well as brothers such as Abu al-Adeeb, President Abu Mazen, Hayel Abd el-Hamid, and Kamal Adwan. From all the brothers came articles that were preparing for what will happen. What was the essence or spirit of the magazine? The spirit of the magazine was very clear and suited the state that the Palestinian people were then in. First there was a repetition, in all ways

possible and in all forms, of a call to all Palestinians ,wherever they are, in any Arab country: why do you support this Arab regime against that Arab regime? Why do you allow one Arab regime to use you against another? To all Palestinians: you have a cause that should have the priority over any regime. Your cause is the cause of Palestine. Be aware, and don't work except within the framework of your cause. Second: to all Palestinians, we thank all the Arab parties, all of them are excellent, all of them say they want to liberate Palestine. You Palestinians have joined various Arab parties, but how close did these Arab parties bring you to Palestine? Listen, be aware, and understand that only Palestinians will liberate Palestine - don't waste your energy, knowledge, and effort working for Arab parties against other Arab parties. With all respect to all these parties, their ideology, and their thought, but you need to regroup for Palestine's sake. These were the main two points: take your cause into your own hands, and don't leave it to either regimes or parties. You are your cause and you must take it into your hands. There was an address in the magazine where articles with new ideas were sent, and we published these. Fateh's thought was covered in two sections: the editorial, which one of the brothers wrote, such as Khalil al-Wazir, Yasser Arafat, Abu Youssef al-Najjar, Abu Mazen; there was also a fixed section in the magazine called Fateh's Corner, but at that time it was called Hatf, and contained the movement's official opinion. After the fourth edition it was changed to Palestinian National Liberation Movement – Fateh, because Fateh heralded a new era, while Hatf (mortality) could push people away. After the first edition was published, we were wondering if this magazine would be allowed into Arab countries and be disseminated among Palestinians and in the refugee camps. Abu Ammar was optimistic and said 10 editions will be allowed. Khalil al-Wazir was less so, and said 6 or 7. I said 8 editions would be allowed. We had a bet where the loser would buy the rest ice-cream, but none of us won. Only the first two editions were allowed in, and then it was prohibited from entering all Arab countries. We had other ways to deliver these editions to Palestinians in any Arab country: we resorted to copying the magazine by hand – actually up until now some of the brothers have handwritten copies of the magazine. Each of them would make two copies and another would make another two, and so on - it was wonderful. Later on when I started meeting them and knew them better, they showed me how they copied the magazine, with carbon-copying paper. Some of them had realized the editorial and Fateh's Corner were the main sections, so they copied only those and disseminated them. For the Palestinian communities in Europe, outside the Arab countries, I kept sending the magazine by normal mail to their addresses. I still have a notebook with many addresses in it. I remember there was a group in Germany and Austria that included Hayel Abd el-Hamid, Hani al-Hassan, Yehia A'ashour, Abdallah al-Franji – very

distinguished and well-known brothers and many others. I forget things, but I still have the address book because it's a good thing to keep.

I always met with my dear friend and brother President Yasser Arafat once or twice a month – he would drive from Kuwait in a light blue Volkswagen, when I lived in Ras al-Nabe' on the first floor. Whenever he arrived he would sound the horn, and my mother, rest in peace, would say "your friend has arrived!". He would rest for a bit in the house.

Then he would be talking, briefing me on the most important things he needed to publish in the magazine, including the editorial and Fateh's Corner, and one story would lead to another. We would drive in the same car on a road we became familiar with - we would drive from Beirut to Jounieh, and then take the coastal road back all the way to Ramel al-Bedar in Khalde, and then return home. We would remain there until his next appointment with someone else. I want to say here, that this was the leader, when this man used to talk with me in the car, or in the house - from the tone of his voice I would feel as if I had returned to Palestine. Through his strength of expression he could make anyone he spoke with feel the certainty of returning to Palestine. When Khalil al-Wazir, a dear brother and friend, would visit with his wife Intisar and the children, we considered them part of the family. He used to visit me at my work without telling me in advance, and would come and sit on the visitors' chair. My assistant, with whom I became very close, would notify me, saying "your friend is here". I would go and sit in front of him and shake hands, then we would go and have coffee in a cafe called *Automatic*, which was across the street from the Beirut municipality building. He always had *chocolamo*. We would talk and set up a time to meet at al-Quds Hotel on al-Maqdisi Street - I think there was a big beautiful tree at the entrance of the hotel. He always carried a briefcase; the articles would be in it. Two people used to deliver the articles and the news. Khalil al-Wazir would give me the articles and discuss the situation. Al-Quds Hotel was a very modest hotel. One time Khalil asked me to meet him in al-Kafitor Hotel, which was a very modern hotel with modern structure. When he mentioned it on the phone the first thing I said, joking: "are you upper class now? You now start to stay in a first class hotel, did something happen?" He replied, not at all but there was an Iraqi delegation in Beirut who knew nothing of Beirut except al-Kafitor. That's why he had to spend the night there. Then he said he would meet me the next day at the al-Quds. This is how things were. Even with the magazine itself, which needed paper, printing and other expenses, he helped me with that. We used to print it at al-Siyasa printing house - there was a newspaper called al-Siyasi, and the printing house itself called al-Siyasi, the former Lebanese Prime Minister the late Abdallah el-Yafi owned it. He was patient

with us if we didn't have the cash to pay the expenses. But when we were very late in paying, and the expenses accumulated, he would become annoyed and say that he had workers he needed to pay... I remember the first break we had arrived as emergency assistance from a very decent man called Mohammed Khaibr al-Jaza'iri who was one of the Algerian revolutionary leaders, but fell out with them later. He sent some German marks and Swiss francs which we exchanged for Lebanese pounds - they came to around 31,000 pounds. We asked Abdallah what the debt was, and it added up to around 19,000 pounds, so we were left with 12,000 pounds, which was a fortune. This how we managed money and expenditure. The Arab states weren't satisfied with preventing Filastinuna from entering Arab countries and went through a committee, I can't remember which, in the Arab League, and passed a regulation prohibiting the magazine from entering all Arab countries, and this included Lebanon. The owner of the printing house said that there was a regulation sent to all printing houses and newspapers so what are we going to do? We told him we would think about it, and we decided to keep printing in Lebanon, adding a statement in big lettering in it that said, "The magazine has moved to a printing house outside of Lebanon." I don't want to miss any details. There was a very distinguished and important international artist called Ismail Shammout - he was a very calm person and enjoyed elevated artistic tastes. I used to meet him before we issued a new edition. His house was on the way to the printing house, at the beginning of Hamad Street, and he would look over the edition's templates, and decide what would work with the template from his great paintings of the Palestinian cause, and give me his views. The last page would always carry one of his paintings that would stir consciousness and emotion. For example, I remember a painting of a small straw chair with a child holding one of its legs, his mother was in front of the chair, and his family was around it. The child was asking his mother "where is my dad?". I remember another of a group of Palestinian refugees, men and women, raising their hands to the sky - the painting was titled a drink of water, they were asking for a drink of water. The paintings added a sense of mobilization to the editions, Abu Ammar's and Khalil al-Wazir's mobilization. Also, there were paintings that were very beautiful. It stirred the feelings of each Palestinian and each Arab, driving them towards contributing towards the Palestinian cause. Part of the magazine's role was to focus on Fateh. The articles used to represent various ideologies such as Islamic, pan-Arab, Marxist, socialist, etc. I would always aim to highlight the editorial and Fateh's Corner. We respected all ideologies without exception, but we wanted these ideologies, and those who believed in them, to serve Palestine. You shouldn't make the cause of Palestine serve your ideologies. This was one of the issues we eventually agreed on. It was one of the most important issues we agreed. Keep your ideology but you are a

Palestinian and an Arab, use what you believe in to serve your cause and Palestine.

Filastinuna and Algeria

A real and genuine admiration for the Algerian Revolution emerged in the magazine. Close relations with the Algerian revolution developed. At that time there was no "first bullet fired" just yet. It was the period of preparation and formulation. The first person who became fully dedicated to Fateh was Khalil al-Wazir, a teacher in Kuwait at that time. Intisar was a girls' high school teacher in Kuwait. He had short time left before he could leave with a pension. If he were to leave his job, and become fully dedicated to Fateh he would lose his pension rights. He came to Beirut and told us the story. We asked him where he wanted to go, and he said to Algeria. He said he wanted to see the people of whom we wrote and are now in power. I asked him when he intended to travel, he replied two days. I visited Nasib al-Barbir, the owner of al-Barbir Hospital. He didn't know anything about this, so I told him the story, and he said great, "we are all concerned about Palestine". I asked him for a medical report saying al-Wazir fell, while getting off the airplane, and couldn't return to Kuwait. He wrote the report and gave me an x-ray as well. I gave it to brother Khalil who sent it to Kuwait and then continued his journey to Algeria. I think the period he requested was two months. They had a rule there where he had to renew his medical leave every 15 days. Dr. Nasib al-Barbir renewed it, and sent the medical reports. What was the benefit of his visit to Algeria? It is worth mentioning and one should mention that through the Algerians, the doors to Vietnam and China opened for the movement. That's why in the 40th and last edition, there was a picture of a Palestinian delegation consisting of Abu Ammar, Abu Jihad, Salah Khalaf, Abu Iyad and Abu Youssef al-Najjar at a meeting with Mao Zedong. His name at that time wasn't very well known. They gave me his name misspelt, they wrote Mao Zedonk, with a K not a G. in the Chinese National People's Congress they sat in a small corner among the large number of attendees. You know when a revolution is victorious there is always instability. I told Abu Jihad when he returned that he was gone for a long time; he said we went to China. He said I want to tell you something, and I asked what happened. He said he asked for an appointment with Ben Bella, waited, but wasn't given an appointment. He said: I took my briefcase and went to the republican palace. It was really busy there - French people, colonialists, white people. This story is undoubtedly big. He said he kept going back and forth, because the revolutionary situation. This is one of the truthful things Abu Ammar said, that he told to the senior brothers: "don't think because our cause is just, that people will come to us - we have to go meet them and chase after them. The justness of a

cause is not enough.” This is true. Al-Wazir said: I kept going back and forth for 18 days until the guards at the door thought I was a member of the Algerian revolution, and started saluting me, thinking because he was dark skinned he looked Algerian, he looked like an Arab. On the 18th day he met Ben Bella, and Ben Bella opened all the resources of Algeria to Fateh. He even transferred the PLO’s office from under Ahmad al-Shoukeiri to Fateh.

Filastinuna and the Intilaqa

In 1964 there was a discussion regarding the Palestine Liberation Organization: now all Palestinians are united, what is the point of having the PLO, which was an appreciated effort, but under Arab States’ jurisdiction and not under our own, us Palestinians? There was an important discussion and a very mature one. Brother Ahmad al-Shoukeiri was included in it. When it was time, Fateh and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) took over the PLO for the sake of our cause. It was like an announcement that Palestinians are now in the battlefield and are taking the initiative to serve their cause. Those who kept arguing, half agreeing and half disagreeing, were told to meet us in the battlefield, let us all meet in the battlefield to fight Israel, the Israeli enemy. We want to liberate Palestine and want to continue the discussion with you, until you are convinced. There should be a separation between the period of ideological maturity, not an easy thing to achieve - it is very important but it is not everything, and the new period of ‘the first bullet fired’. There was agreement to launch the first operation and continue advocating for the idea under the name of al-A’asifah. If the operation succeeded al-A’asifah would become the military wing of Fateh. If the operation failed, al-A’asifa would cease to exist, and Fateh would stay distant from its failure. That’s why the publication of Filastinuna stopped and a replacement called al-A’asifa newsletter was published: the statement for the first operation was placed in al-A’asifa, so there would a confirmation of this operation. Abu Ammar distributed the statement of the operation, for which he designed the route, and then made the preparations himself for the newspapers. A radio station was established. The range of this radio station wasn’t terrific, but it covered an important area of the Arab World. I was asked to broadcast the statement with my own voice, and I read the statement at this station. The statement is recorded and documented in the movement’s archive. The statement was repeated by a great activist and a very dear sister. Layla Siran, she was the wife of the former primer minister Amin al-Hafiz. The statement was repeated with her announcement. Citizens received this news in the Arab world with a great sense of pride; they felt they truly had their destiny in their own hands and Palestine became their responsibility.

The problem represented by the statement “pan-Arabism is our path to Palestine, and Palestine is our path to pan-Arabism” was now solved.